**Acéphale**

The name *Acéphale* refers to two related projects: one is a journal, founded by Georges Bataille (1887-1962), published between 1936 and 1939, whose articles often extolled Friedrich Nietzsche’s philosophy; the second refers to a secret society that formed around Bataille. That the term derives from the Greek ἀκέφαλος (akephalos, ‘headless’) made it an appropriate name for the counter-religion Bataille aimed at founding to revitalize the mythic experience of plenitude: the head, Bataille maintained, stands for hierarchical organization and God, so the society and journal that gave the gnostic-inflected counter-religion expression should be headless. Bataille’s interest in an atheological counter-religion was grounded in the principle of expenditure he saw manifested in unproductive forms of consumption, which have no end beyond themselves, and thereby constitute an irrecoverable loss. This anti-Platonic, anti-renascence social body would beheadless because it would recover, within the isolation that confines modern humans, the vitalizing experience of the sacred—that is, of a privileged moment of communal unity and convulsive communication of ordinarily suppressed sensations. It would headless, too, because the Dionysian-orgiastic rituals of the secret society would be aimed against both reason and identity. Bataille’s conviction that ultimate expenditure is ‘the gift of the self’ led the participants in *Acéphale* to an interest in sacrifice*.*

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**Figures**

Masson, A. (1936) Cover of *Ac*é*phale* 3-4 (July 1937). (http://bit.ly/N6PoZE)

**List of works**

Bataille, G. (1999) *L’Apprenti sorcier: Du Cercle Communiste Démocratique à Acéphale, textes, lettres et documents (1932-1939)*, ed. M. Galletti, trans. N. Vital, Paris:Édition de la Différence. (Primary texts concerning *Acéphale*.)

------ (1976) ‘La limite de l’utile’, in *Œuvres complètes* VII, 235–242. (A key presentation of the *dépense*, expenditure, as an antidote to utility.)

**References and further reading**

Surya, M. (2002) ‘Everything Calls for the Death Which Ravages Us’ in *Georges Bataille: An Intellectual Biography*, trans. K. Filjalkowski and M. Richardson, London and New York: Verso: 235–253. (Surya’s book is now the standard biography of Bataille in English; he provides a good overview of the two facets of *Acéphale*.)

Weiss, A. (1986) ‘Impossible Sovereignty: Between “The Will to Power” and “The Will to Chance”, *October* 36: 128–146. (Lays out the Nietzschean ideas behind *Acéphale*.)